

# In a virtual world, 17-year-old inventor offers old-school fun with new card game

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Published 12:31 p.m. ET Jul. 29, 2020 | Updated 12:41 p.m. ET Jul. 29, 2020



Harrison Brooks, 17, of Lincoln, inventor of ElevatorUp, a face-to-face card game, sits in his family's kitchen on July 28, 2020. Most of Brooks' sales and marketing have moved online due to COVID-19. Courtesy ElevatorUp

Video games have the bells and whistles, but nothing beats a face-to-face card game, says inventor Brooks Harrison, 17.

The Lincoln-based entrepreneur has invested time, effort and money into that premise. His latest creation, ElevatorUp, hit the shelves (via Amazon) this summer, after several years of research and development.

Why go retro in the golden era of online entertainment?

“I’m not huge on computer games,” Brooks explained in a phone interview. “Even playing with friends, it doesn’t feel like you’re spending time with them. You’re not sitting around joking and laughing.”

Brooks grew up in the Bronx, in a family that always had hands-on games within easy reach. He absorbed rules, strategies — and an appreciation for how folks unwind, even as they compete.

“You can be super-involved, and you’re still able to have a side conversations,” he said. “You can still have interactions with other players: it’s not just a game.”

## Building a game from the ground up

ElevatorUp, a card game for players ages 7 and older, is also a business.

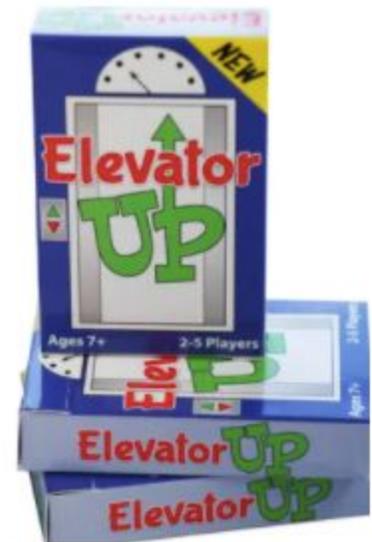
Brooks worked through prototypes for several years. His early-version decks were hand-drawn on computer printer paper.

Product testing on family and friends helped him settle on a central theme:

Higher-numbered cards relate to successively higher floors on a building, from Lobby to Penthouse.

“I’ve always liked elevators,” Brooks said. “I grew up in New York, where elevators are a part of daily life.”

In the game, players aim to ascend to the heights of a building, winning by skillfully discarding every card in their hand.



ElevatorUp, a card game invented by 17-year-old Lincoln resident Harrison Brooks, hits the shelves in summer 2020. Most of Brooks' sales and marketing have moved online due to COVID-19. Courtesy ElevatorUp

Or they might find themselves in every passenger's nightmare: stuck between floors.

Brooks refined the graphics and the instructions. He accumulated venture capital by setting aside money from his job at a veterinarian's office.

This spring he created a website and a promotional video. He leapt into Instagram and Twitter (@PlayElevatorUp).

He contracted with a professional printer for an initial run of 250 shrink-wrapped decks.

Producing more units would have yielded a cheaper deck-by-deck cost, Brooks noted, but posed a greater financial risk.

He has shipped about 50 games so far, at \$9.99 a pop.

"This is a trial," he said. "I'm losing a little money on every order."

## **The profit — and joy — motive**

Brooks' emphasis on market share, rather than profit, is a strategy shared by some notable tech giants, including Amazon.

Brooks deviates from another pattern followed by many modern start-ups: He is not hoping to be taken over by a larger business.

"I don't know that I'd want ElevatorUp to go to a huge corporation — I'm too invested in it. I want to stay in control," he said.

If he ever did sell, Brooks said he would insist upon keeping youngsters in key positions.

“Kids think about things in a different way,” he explained. “Sometimes they can be more creative, because they’re thinking that anything is a possibility. They know games and they know what kids like.”

But Brooks has little time to map his company's future. He remains focused on marketing ElevatorUp during a pandemic that favors e-commerce.



Harrison Brooks, 17, of Lincoln, inventor of ElevatorUp, a face-to-face card game, demonstrates his wares in the family kitchen on July 28, 2020. Most of Brooks' sales and marketing have moved online due to COVID-19. Courtesy ElevatorUp

Had had hoped to drum up sales this summer with in-person demonstrations.

"It's easier to get excited about sharing something face-to-face," he said. "I'd been planning to go game shows and to local stores, where I could set up a table and do some demos. But that's not happening, obviously.

"Online, it's all about algorithms and advertising," he added. "You have to spend a lot of money to find customers."

Online, in a marketing blurb he wrote for GamesRules.com, Brooks spells out his underlying mission: generosity.

"That truly is my only goal for ElevatorUp," he wrote, "to bring as much joy to as many people as I can."

## A product you can hold in your hand

As a rising high school senior, Brooks also tends to practical matters — such as future job security. He says his longtime interest in science and medicine might steer him into a career as a veterinarian.

But he feels an entrepreneurial tug, too; one that draws on his belief in emphatically non-virtual realities.



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“I like creating a physical product that you can hold in your hand – and that you can sell to someone,” he said. “The concept is simple – but that aspect of business is getting lost.”

It has become far too easy, Brooks added, to sidestep solidity. He is unnerved by the sight of people – including youngsters in strollers – scrolling through dozens of games on a smart-phone screen.

At the very least, he said, a lot of folks are just plain missing out.

“It’s nothing like playing games with friends and family,” he added. “It’s nothing like holding the cards and rolling the dice.”

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